



## NORTHERN ROCKIES COORDINATING GROUP

July 27, 2005

### Safety Alert

**Area of Concern:** Firefighter Safety—Changing Fuel Conditions and Potential for Extreme Fire Behavior

**Distribution:** Geographic Area Wide

**Discussion:** The effects of the wet June on fuel moistures has been negated by the warm and windy weather that has occurred over the last two weeks. Whereas June precipitation was 100-200% of normal, July thus far is running less than 20% of normal over many areas. Dead fuel moistures have dried quickly and 1000-hour fuel moistures and energy release components are approaching or exceeding the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile over much of the region. This, coupled with the above average growth of grasses and shrubs, will lead to abundant available fuel once the understory vegetation cures, which has already begun in many areas.

So far the fire season has been slow to start in much of the Northern Rockies. This is partly due to the excessive greenup that occurred and the lack of lightning over the majority of the geographic area. **Don't expect this to continue as the weather outlook for the next week calls for hot temperatures and low humidities. The effects of the long-term drought are still with us.**

#### Fire Behavior Concerns to Firefighters and the Public:

- Expect fine fuels to ignite easily and fires to move rapidly, especially in valley locations, south aspects, and on steep slopes
- Expect heavy fuel loading that will lead to intense fire behavior. This will result in fires with a high resistance to control. Large fuels are already showing complete consumption on recent fires.
- Expect continuous fuels. The growth that occurred due to the wet spring will support fire growth in areas that typically wouldn't burn in past years.
- Ladder fuels are beginning to show signs of moisture stress and will allow fires to climb into the crowns. This will lead to many embers starting spot fires.
- Predicted hot temperatures with low humidities will result in high probability of ignition for new starts as well as spot fires.
- Anticipate fires to remain active in thermal belts.

#### Tactics:

- Ensure good anchor points. Direct attack using LCES is still the best strategy in most of the Northern Rockies fuel types. Keep one foot in the black.
- Anticipate flame lengths when determining safety zones.
- Keep LCES at the forefront with particular attention given to lookouts. Undetected spot fires could spread quickly during the heat of the day.